

COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

Representative Rebecca Chavez-Houck, Commission Co-Chair

Representative Becky Edwards, Commission Co-Chair

Judy Barnett, Executive Director, Utah Labor Community Services, Utah AFL-CIO

Kathy Bounous, General Counsel and Director of Adjudication, Department of Workforce Services

Anne Burkholder, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Utah

Senator Luz Escamilla

Senator Deidre Henderson

Dr. Jennifer Robinson, Associate Director, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah

Ann Marie Wallace, Program Director, Salt Lake Chamber Women's Business Center

Background and Overview

During the 2014 general session, the legislature created a Commission on Women in the Economy. The Governor signed the legislation and it became law in May 2014. The Commission is composed of representatives from the Utah Legislature (both House and Senate), the Department of Workforce Services, labor organizations, the non-profit sector, academia, and the private sector.

The Legislature tasked the commission to:

- Facilitate the communication and coordination of public and private entities that provide services to women or protect the rights of women;
- Study, evaluate, and report on the status and effectiveness of policies, procedures, and programs that provide services to women or protect the rights of women;
- Facilitate and conduct the research and study of issues related to women in the economy;
- Provide a forum for public comment on issues related to women in the economy;
- Provide public information on women in the economy and the services available to women;
- Encourage state and local governments to analyze, plan, and prepare for the impact of women in the economy on services and operations; and
- Annually prepare and publish a report

In 2014 the Commission created three strategic priorities based on the legislation. The strategic priorities create the guiding principles for the efforts of the Commission and are as follows:

1. Increase awareness of the status of women in Utah's economy.
2. Conduct additional research to better understand women's status as it relates to the economy.
3. Influence public policy

To address the strategic priorities, the Commission created three committees made up of members of the Commission and other key partners across the state whose knowledge and expertise support the work of the committees. The committees are as follows:

1. Policy, Representative Rebecca Chavez-Houck, Chair
2. Communication, Ann Marie Wallace, Chair
3. Research, Dr. Jennifer Robinson, Chair

The work of the committees will be described later in the report.

Commission Activities

In an effort to meet the Commission goals, focus has been placed on gathering important information directly from experts around the state who work in various capacities to improve the lives of women in the state. Several experts met with, and presented information to, the commission members. The following topics were presented to the commission over the last year:

- Public assistance and workforce development programs administered by the Department of Workforce Services and potential gaps in service for women in need with specific focus on the TANF and Child Care programs.
- The disproportionate effects of intergenerational poverty on women.
- Measures of women in Utah's workforce—the myths and the realities.
- How Utah Futures works and what role it could play in informing Utah women about careers.
- STEM careers for women, supporting STEM curious students and job seekers with mentoring programs and the Women's Tech Council.
- Demographics shaping Utah.
- The mission and goals of the Women's Leadership Institute.
- Regulations impeding the work of those in disproportionately female occupations (e.g., interior design).
- The role professional organizations can play in supporting and mentoring women who pursue education and career tracks with low female representation. (Examples came from transportation industry, water supply industry, and the engineering field.)
- The true measure of Utah's wage gap.

- Outreach and support for female high school students as they transition into college. Tools for encouraging female students to apply for college, especially students from underrepresented populations (e.g., low income).

The Commission has also coordinated efforts with many organizations around the state whose missions carry the same theme as that of the Commission's or whose work relates directly or indirectly to improving the lives of women in our state. These organizations include: YWCA Utah, The Women's Leadership Institute, The Salt Lake Chamber's Women's Business Center, The Governor's Education Advisor (Tami Pyfer), several division directors from the Department of Workforce Services, the Executive Director of the STEM Action Center, researchers and economists from the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah, several current and former legislators, the State Auditor, representatives from IDEAL-UT, members of the Utah Chapter of Women in Transportation, members of the Society of Women Engineers, members of Women of Water, Utah Education and Technology Network, Associate Commissioners of Higher Education, K-12 school counselors, and researchers from Voices for Utah's Children.

The commission was also afforded the opportunity to participate in a roundtable discussion with Tom Perez, the current Secretary of the Department of Labor regarding women in Utah's labor force. Dialogue with the Secretary focused on general challenges women face in the labor force, and how those challenges play out specifically in the state of Utah, where there are large families, many working mothers, and mothers who choose not to work.

Workgroup Committees Under the Commission

In December 2014, the Commission created and approved three committees as a way to implement the Commission's strategic priorities. The following is a list of the three committees and their accomplishments to date:

1. Communications--The Commission created a communications committee and established the goals to educate the public, respond to media inquiries, and proactively interact with key stakeholders regarding women in the economy of Utah. With the communications committee's assistance, the Commission was involved in the following:
 - a. Media Exposure:
 - i. Mention in the January 22, 2015 press release for the Voices for Utah Children report Utah's [Gender Opportunity: An examination of the difference between the earnings of Utah men and women](#), which mentioned topics to be considered by the Women in the Economy Commission.
 - ii. Good4Utah April 30, 2015 segment by Kim Fischer "Gender Gap: Closing the gap in Utah" featured Women in the Economy Commission co-chairs, Representatives Rebecca Chavez-Houck

and Becky Edwards, who expressed their knowledge of the position of women in Utah's economy:

<http://www.good4utah.com/news/local-utah-state-news-/gender-gap-closing-the-gap-in-utah>

- b. Women in the Economy Website:
 - i. The commission is developing a website which will share information, educate and provide resources regarding women in Utah as related to the economy.
 - ii. Utah Interactive is currently building a website using the layout and content provided by the committees, which will highlight *Policy, Research, In the News* and *Resources*.
 - iii. women.utah.gov should launch by the end of November 2015.
2. Policy—The Commission created a policy committee whose charge is to identify policy gaps based on information gathered by the commission and find the best avenue for supporting policy developments to close those gaps. Their accomplishments thus far include:
 - a. Review of various research findings presented by Utah higher education institutions, state agencies and nonprofits and delineated in this report.
 - b. Development of guiding principles to refine how the Commission can best use this extensive information to consider legislation and appropriations requests to better meet our stated purpose.
 - c. The committee has also met with other organizations, such as the Women's Leadership Institute, in order to complement each other's work, avoid to duplicating efforts, and fill existing policy and research gaps.
3. Research—The research committee was created to respond to informational gaps identified by member of the Commission. The composition of the group, which includes researchers from the public sector and academia, allows for research responses in a myriad of disciplines and approaches. Their accomplishments thus far include:
 - a. *Status of Utah Women Report*--The research committee developed a draft report on the status of women in Utah. The report covers the following topics: poverty; educational attainment; occupations and labor force participation; business ownership; wages; and leadership positions for women. The report is currently under review.

- b. *Focus Groups and Surveys Research*--The research committee, with support from the YWCA Utah, submitted a grant to the Walmart Foundation for a research project that will gather data, via focus group methods, from a diverse set of Utah women and increase understanding of the causal drivers that lead to the lower status of Utah women relative to their national peers. Having better information about the drivers will allow Utah decision-makers to propose and implement targeted solutions that help overcome these barriers and ultimately improve the lives of women, their families, and the Utah economy. Currently policy makers are hindered by a lack of qualitative data, leading them to make assumptions regarding the drivers behind these trends. Some policy makers assume that differences between Utah women and their national peers are due to unique values and preferences among Utah women rather than due to particular barriers and challenges women might face. Specific, tailored, and accurate information is a critical component in designing successful policies and building the support and momentum needed to pass legislation to move these policies forward.

The proposed research will lay the groundwork for a much-needed statewide survey that will focus on the status of Utah women. The women who participate in the focus groups will help design a survey instrument that asks the right questions to gather vital information from women throughout the state of Utah. It is critical that the survey be conducted using scientific methods including a questionnaire of appropriate length that meets the survey objectives, trained professional interviewers, and a good sampling plan that is truly representative of the women in Utah. Bilingual interviewers will be used when needed to ensure that the non-English-speaking women in Utah are included in the important study. Analysis of the survey data gathered in the survey process will provide a more complete understanding of the diverse experiences of women in Utah.

The foundation is expected to make a decision on the funding for this project by the end of November.

Commission Goals for 2016

In the upcoming year, the Commission will focus on positioning itself as a resource for stakeholders throughout the state who seek to improve the lives of women in Utah. The Commission will also act as a convener to complement what other groups are doing to support women in the workforce. These strategic collaborations will be aligned to meet the strategic goals mentioned earlier in this document.